

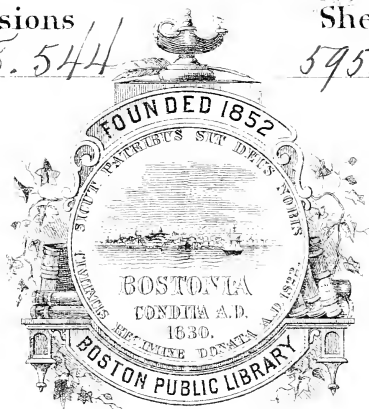
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AN
ORATION

ON THE
DUTIES AND THE REQUIREMENTS OF AN
AMERICAN OFFICER.

DELIVERED BEFORE THE
DIALECTIC SOCIETY
OF THE
UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY

AT
WEST POINT, N. Y., JUNE 5, 1852.

BY
M. C. M. HAMMOND,
OF SOUTH CAROLINA;

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF VISITORS.

Published by order of the Dialectic Society.

NEW YORK:
BAKER, GODWIN & CO., PRINTERS,
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ORATION.

It was remarked by one of the wise men of modern times, that the "duties of life are more than life itself." This was not the speech of a devotee or a martyr, looking to the rewards of another world, nor of the canting hypocrite, who ever assumes in speech, as the safest disguise, the approved maxims of experience. It was the profound thought of Francis Bacon, a lawyer, a statesman ; a man of high religious sentiment, although not a moralist in his own example ; and one of the fathers of philosophy, whose grasping and pervading genius penetrated all departments of human inquiry, and whose works, while they established, are illustrative of, an era in history.

The citation is not made to serve as the text of a sermon, which, to youth in general, and more particularly to the military of this Institution, whose attendance is enforced by regulation, would be more wearisome than a "thrice told tale ;" nor, indeed, to exact a careless or indefinite assent to its abstract truth. But it is employed for practical application, on the present occasion and to the present audience. Although

the rules of rational conduct in life are never scrupulously followed in practice, and, from the instability of human purpose, and the capricious gales of passion, at the most may only be approximated, yet the lessons of instruction should not be abated, but rather the more frequently repeated, and the more persistently urged. The apothegm of Bacon is broad and general in its terms. It is inclusive of all professions, all avocations, all pursuits; while denunciatory of no individual who is worthily employed, or profitably, to the physical man, the intellectual, or the moral.

Duty, in its high sense, is a prerogative of man. It is one of the great moral traits which distinguish him from the brute. The definition of man offered by Plato, is insufficient even for the external appearance; a truer or more proper one, in this respect, would be, that he is an animal which laughs. But the perception and the consciousness of virtue and its rewards in this world, and the universal and unwavering faith of a recompense in a future state, are exclusively human. They are more than instinct, which, resolved to its last element, is the principle of self-preservation. They are more than sagacity, which is cultivated or sharpened instinct, and which weaves its wiles, or frustrates those of others, for selfish and temporary purposes. They were the deductions of reason among the pagans; they are the fundamentals of divine revelation to the Christian.

There is discrimination in the bearings of the maxim, and there are classifications to which its application may

be accommodated. Duties are various for each—those to the Creator, those to one's country, to his kind, to himself. And there are grades of duty, adapted to the endowments, the attainments, the opportunities, the tastes. The wise and the simple, the cultivated and the ignorant, move in different spheres of thought and action. The one class is the enlightener of the race. Like the high mountain, he is visible a long way, and the breeze around his summit wafts the influence of his meditations to distant parts: the other is the vegetable of the intellectual creation, the humble hillock, viewing the superior through a hazy light, and receiving mental pabulum in drippings from his airy habitation. The one, according to Solomon, "considereth which way;" the other, "putteth to more strength." The one class, according to Bacon, "earns his daily bread by the sweat of the brow," which arises from the "working and discoursing of the spirits in the brain;" the other performs the necessary part of the manual, the physical producer. Their occupations are diverse, and so likewise are the requirements demanded at their hands; and both are inspired with buoyant hopefulness to elevate their condition; but, in general, the one would be to higher thought and broader usefulness; while the other would be to the greater enjoyment of sensual comforts.

Under a free government, like the American, with the sources of knowledge comparatively within the reach of all, with the avenues of preferment opened widely, and with few adventitious circumstances calculated to

promote or repress the desires of any, the choice of pursuit and the position attained depend greatly on the elements of individual character. Those whose ambition impels them into the noble yet arduous paths of learning and education, incur high responsibilities and correlative duties. To them are intrusted the preservation of freedom, conducive to public happiness; and the advancement of the moral virtues, essential to social progress and contentment. They are the instructors and leaders of the masses. They are the promoters, if not always the originators, of invention and discovery. They give tone to customs, to manners, to religious sentiment. Considering the vast cycles of knowledge traversed in past ages, they assume the laborious and difficult task of checking, at least, a retrograde movement of the human mind; in fine, they stand on the pinnacle of the race, to guide it to good or to evil. How obvious the deduction, and how lucid its truth, that the exactions from them are so much "more than life," as mankind is superior to the individual, and even as the Creator is to the creature!

It should be borne in mind, that education does not consist always in the accumulation of learning; nor is learning of itself, by any means education. The former is a collection of other men's ideas, retained by good memory, and may never be employed, because they may not undergo that digestive process of the mind which converts them into knowledge. The latter gives the *power of thinking*; which, promptly spoken, is yet so hard

to acquire, that the bulk even of the civilized and refined are still in the horn-book of its teaching. It trains and develops the mental faculties; it controls their vagaries; it facilitates the rapid attainment, and the judicious application of knowledge; from the former base it raises towards the apex of the pyramid; by a catalytic action—a word from agricultural chemistry—it changes the thoughts of others into one's own: it is, in illustration, the superiority of quick and lofty genius over tedious and cumulative application. This faculty, scarcely second to natural endowment, and obtained by patient toil, is possessed, in degree, by the élèves of the Military Academy. The method of instruction tends to insure it. It is one of the bright distinctions which give character to the Institution, perhaps above all others in the country. The power should be preserved by after practice. It should not be permitted to perish amid the excesses of debauchery, nor to rust in the equally dangerous inanity of slothful habits. *Arcum intensio frangit; animum, remissio*—much bending, breaks the bow; much unbending, the mind.

To no collective portion of the intellectual and the polished, could the observations which have been made be more appositely addressed, than to the members of the Military Academy. You are in the flush of manhood, in the spring of life; that period when the heart's quick pulsations urge to the execution of the bold conceptions of the brain. Your ambition, like the spur of the soldier, is keen. Your bow of hope shines brightly

as at midday, unclouded by the shadows of experience, and not a hue faded by the disappointments of external strife. Your energy, that vitality of existence, the electric battery of action, the steam engine of all progress in all human affairs, has not yet been drawn upon, and awaits only the occasion to awaken it to great and enduring efforts. On leaving your educational noviciate within these Halls, on departing from these Barracks, and escaping the stringent rules which have controlled your wayward tendencies, and fitted you to be men—all of which may be considered intolerable curtailments of privilege and enjoyment; yet, in after years notwithstanding, the career here will be reverted to, as the halcyon period of life—you will proudly don your armor for the wordly conflict. Prepared as you will be, and impelled by the stimuli alluded to, how much should we anticipate from you in the broad fields of human trial and achievement!

An eminent writer has said, "the arts which flourish in times while virtue is in growth, are military, and while virtue is in state, are liberal, and while virtue is in declination, are voluptuary." Again, says Lord Bacon, "in the youth of a state, arms do flourish; in the middle age, learning; and then both of them together for a time; in the declining age, mechanic arts and merchandise." The old world may be on the "descent of the wheel." But in young and vigorous America, which with gigantic strides has advanced up the heights of grandeur, virtue is yet in growth, the military arts should flourish, and

all others will follow their progress. A physiological fact, that the action of the heart is fourteen times per minute more rapid here than among the nations of Europe, may be the principal cause of that pressing energy by which America has distanced all the peoples that have arisen on the earth, in the progress of the industrial arts, and of the exact and other sciences. The military arts, as witness all histories of the origin of empires, are not only reciprocally promotive of others, but, more particularly, of private and public virtues—of hardihood—of heroic valor—of fortitude—of truth and of magnanimity. Shall the profession of arms, which aids to develope, and, at the same time, owes its nascent properties to, these high qualities, become the laggard in America? Shall man, with us, direct all his thoughts and energies to the practices of gain, to the schemes of the demagogue, to general literature, to political philosophy? Is there no opening for, no reward attending, the prosecution of the science of war? Indeed, there is no country where it should be held in higher estimation, and our past history conclusively proves that Americans belong to the dominant and military races of the world.

The early colonial conflicts gave evidence of the stamina of the population. The revolution, harbingered by the flag of independence, and led by strong intellects stimulated by patriotic fervor, promised, and occasionally realized, the lofty union of courage and conduct. The recent war with Mexico fulfilled this promise, and stamps on the national escutcheon a genius for arms, in

many respects not surpassed by any in the annals of mankind. This last result, said your general-in-chief publicly and repeatedly in the enemy's capitol, was eminently due, under Providence, to the enlightened exertions of the graduates of this Institution. Your hearts should swell with emulous pride, in viewing the renown of your predecessors. The mantle of their brilliant achievements may be cast upon your shoulders; and, with the eagle ambition which becomes the soldier, no effort should be spared, no labor nor hazard refused, that would prepare you for such glorious rivalry. Yet, aided by their experience, and by future improvements in the art,—to which you may give the impulse,—and fortified by profounder attainments than was practicable for them to acquire, should you not fix your aim an arrow-flight beyond theirs? And, in the anticipated advancement of all the arts and sciences, think you, after the bright deeds of the past, that the world will not expect of you a grander future?

But these are the actions of existing warfare. When the trumpet no longer calls to battle, when peaceful times supervene—the true period for calm investigation and steady thought, the condition in which our country is now placed—shall there be no intellectual preparation for the alternative? Shall the art of war continue to shine here, by lights borrowed from European inventions or adaptations? When the academic halls and the plain upon which you practice pass from your view, and your instructors are no longer eloquent to your understand-

ings of professional studies, shall the apathy of national peace be permitted to quench your present aspirations, and divert you from the laborious yet elevating duties that are demanded to secure your own fame, and enhance that of your country ?

Let me inquire, then ; what are the duties and the requirements of an American officer ?

To the topic of which this question is the germ, there cannot be applied a thorough examination ; nor, indeed, would the limited period for preparation, and the intervening impediments, justify an attempt at elaborate discussion. The subject, however, has been especially selected for the suggestion of a few thoughts, for its appropriateness to your position, and as the most valuable and important that can arrest your attention. Coming home to you so directly, it is yet a matter, perhaps, upon which you have reflected but little, and that little too often erroneously.

You are all candidates for the honorable distinction of being American officers ; yet, of those who may attain the object of their wishes—and it is hoped that all of you will do so—how many will enter upon their career seriously and profoundly impressed with the high and peculiar privileges, and the equally high and peculiar duties of their station ? Without designing any personal or offensive allusion—for I, too, have shared their infirmities—what are the usual pursuits of the officers of the army, and what is their view, in general, of the position they occupy, and the grave responsibilities they incur, in the

great theatre of the world? The immediate and necessary duties of their profession being daily performed, how are the intervals of time employed, and what are the customary resorts for amusement or occupation? Whether on the Atlantic or the Pacific coast, or at intermediate stations, whether in the cities or on the frontiers, too many of them are to be seen frequenting the haunts of idleness and dissipation. The refined and the manly indulgences of the ball room and the chase, carried to a reasonable extent, cannot be censured. They are perfectly consistent with the elegant gallantry, and the hardy daring, which become a soldier and an officer. But our allusion is here meant for the sensual and ignoble gratifications of the tavern, the brothel, and the gaming table; to which, unfortunately, too much of the hope and promise of America are fatuously devoted.

The principles of chivalry, the gentleness, the polish, the generosity, the courage, which characterize the knightly and the courtly gentleman, as described by Edmund Burke, "the loyalty to rank, the proud submission, the dignified obedience, the unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise, the sensibility of virtue, the chastity of honor which feels a stain like a wound—which inspire bravery while they mitigate ferocity, and ennoble whatever they touch,"—these are, in high degree, imbibed at the Military Academy. Preserved in purity by numbers who have departed hence, who concurred in practice with another sentiment of Burke's, "that all the

good things of manners and civilization for several ages have resulted from the combination of two principles, the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion," the army has been leavened to some extent. Those who can recall its condition thirty or forty years ago, will mark the difference in its tone, its sentiments and morals ; and the candid will be at no loss to trace the cause to its legitimate source. Still, it cannot be denied that there is great laxity of conduct, and, consequently, wide room for reformation. Such evil course on the part of many may be the natural consequence of idleness, that fundamental principle of vice and iniquity ; but this idleness proceeds from an erroneous reflection, or, perhaps, the absence of any reflection whatever, on the peculiar condition of the American officer. Supported without the necessity of exertion ; restrained from mingling in the ordinary business transactions of the world ; surrounded by, commonly, dissolute fellow-beings taken from the lowest class of society, with whom he can have no social intercourse, yet whose association may unconsciously contaminate ; and doomed to a dull and unvaried routine of mere practical duties, which soon cease to afford the slightest mental or physical excitement ; with the prospect of promotion in his profession, especially in " piping times of peace," too slender and too little under his control to arouse his ambition ;—he fancies himself forced, by a kind of moral necessity, to fly for relief to all the gross and licentious indulgences within his reach. At small garrisons, as at present, the ennui becomes most intolerable

and the temptations to vicious habits less easy to be resisted.

But how weak is such conduct on the part of the officer, to say nothing of its wickedness ! what a prostitution of divinely appointed faculties ! what a debasement and perversion of the eminent attainments conferred by his Alma Mater ! what an ungrateful return to the country, for the fostering care with which she has nurtured and promoted his intellectual and moral qualities ! What a curse to himself, to contemplate the hard ordeal endured here, the genius, the knowledge, the proud ambition, the kindling energies, all prostrated in the depths of ignominy !—forgetting *virtus rationis absolutio definitur*, that virtue is the perfection of reason—forgetting *gloria virtutem tanquam umbram sequitur*, that glory accompanies virtue, as it were its very shadow—and forgetting also *voluptas mentis perstringit oculos*, that debauchery blindfolds the eyes of the mind, while he destroys the physical capabilities, and plunges heart and intellect into Cimmerian darkness !

Admitting that the present peaceful attitude of this country precludes the prospect of an early war, and therefore checks the hope of prompt advancement, and of the immediate acquisition of renown from deeds of arms ; and, admitting that the allurements of avarice, and the excitements of political honors, are forbidden—is not the field of ambition and glory still wide enough, and openly spread before him ? Are there no other pursuits besides those actually in the tented field—no

other noble triumphs but those derived from conflicting armies? It is true that the achievements of peace are rarely so brilliant as those of war, but they are often more permanently useful, and they always prepare the way for, and insure the success of, military operations. Although Lord Bacon asserts, that "the principle of greatness in any state, is to have a race of military men;" and however ready to accord with its wisdom, yet to establish the rule there need not be incessant warfare. There is a moral power, not only vastly superior to the physical, but which guides and controls it. Its cultivation and perfection are of greatly more importance; and the period of hostilities is required, rather to apply, than to develope or mature it.

Cast the eye of thought over the number and the diversity of intellectual pursuits, and there will readily be perceived the bounteous openings for distinction in arenas adapted to the tastes and to the varied endowments of educated officers. The officer may tread the mazes of philosophy with Socrates, Locke and Stewart. He may search the deep phenomena of nature with Aristotle, Bacon and Des Cartes. He may ascend the heaven of astronomy with Pythagoras, Galileo and Herschel, or pry into the secrets of the earth with Davy and Liebig. He may trace the history of man with Herodotus and Gibbon; or revel in poetic visions with Homer, Shakspeare and Milton; or wander through the flowery paths of literature with Addison, Johnson and Scott. The whole range of art, science, history, poetry,

literature and nature herself, is before him, inviting to embrace, and rewarding at every step he takes. Every moment that can be snatched from the avocations of his profession, may be passed in the most exquisite and ennobling indulgences, and every dream of an ambition directed to any of these pursuits, may be satisfactorily realized.

But the mere reading of such authors, and the prosecution of such studies, are not sufficient. They may serve, thus, to beguile the hours of leisure—to strengthen those negative virtues which deter from dissipated practices—or, at most, to fit the mind for enjoying the intellectual pleasures of another life, which, if our view of religion be not altogether false, are presented to the good, at least in corresponding degree to their cultivation here. Restriction to these ends, would be selfish and unworthy. The duty to the individual self, the humblest of all, would alone be rendered. There are higher duties, to engage his affections and enlist his labors. His learning, his discoveries, his theories of physical or mental or moral progress, should not be confined to the limited sphere of his own meditations. He must promulgate them for the benefit of the race.

“Reading,” said Bacon, “maketh the full man, speaking the ready man, writing the accurate man.” The intermediate, speaking, is precluded to the officer. Conformity to the customs of his profession, his want of thorough training, his often remote and solitary station, utterly deny him the exercise of this power.

The former and the latter must be united. The two actions are reciprocally effective, and to the earnest soul they are naturally conjoined. Reading should induce writing—writing enforces reading. The mind crowded with thought, demands utterance. The pen is the great lever of expression—the press, the grand disseminator to the human family. “Knowledge is sovereign, and the press is the royal seat on which she sits, a sceptered monarch. From this she rules public opinion, and finally gives laws alike to prince and people; laws, framed by men of letters; by the wandering bard; by the philosopher in his grove or portico, his tower or laboratory; by the pale student in his closet.” The officer, with means economically expended affording a partial supply of books, his regimental library furnishing others, wherever situated, whether on the civilized slope to the ocean, on the bleak cliffs of the Lakes, or within the recesses of the wilderness, will always find the press accessible. And, from its tripod of authority, his teachings, if truthful and valuable, will be extended over the world, to influence or control mankind, while investing his name with a pure and bloodless renown, and transmitting it, in miniature immortality, to a distant generation.

The art of composition, the stumbling block to the diffident and the sensitive, is not so difficult as it would seem. It has been said that the number of ideas which may be termed separately and abstractly new, is not very great, and that the combination of them, the application and the expression, are almost all that may

be legitimately sought. The language employed as the vehicle to convey, and the modes of arranging and arraying them, constitute the peculiarities of style, varied with each individual, and, for artistlike perfection, demanding long practice and studious observation. The well-educated early penetrate these mysteries, and, if the mental faculties are such as to limit the expression in the quality of force or vigor, there may at least be no violation of propriety. But for bold and striking thought and lofty sentiment, there needs no drapery, but spontaneously outflowing words, which the cultivated rarely misuse, and more rarely solicit, and to which intensity will give the great requisite of perspicuity. The exposition of truth, invaluable and exalted truth, should be the guiding design, as it is the aim of the recipients; and although there are advantages pertaining to its appearance in the garbs of chastity and refinement, still, these are by no means controlling. However presented, Truth is never unwelcome. Even the terms of conversation, simple and direct, would be amply sufficient; but the instruction at the Military Academy and the ordinary duties of the Dialectic Society, have afforded to its members other and higher advantages. The modesty or diffidence of the officer, in a measure pervading his class, to assume the function of literary or philosophic instructor of his fellow-men, has heretofore aided to divert him from the task and restrain his high impulses, superinducing desultory application and a fitful and wayward direction of his energies; while many a burning thought,

and many a profound conviction, have perished with the brain which conceived them. He should remember the pithy remark, "that some things are more difficult to attempt than to achieve," and that—

Our doubts are traitors,
And make us lose the good we oft might win,
By fearing to attempt.

He should likewise remember, in common with all who have commanded success, *possunt, quia posse videntur*—they *are* able because they *seem* to be able—embodying the principle of confidence, of self reliance, which he would never acknowledge to be wanting on the theatre of military operations, or in the field of battle; and he should be reluctant to acknowledge the deficiency on any field to which his genius may conduct him.

It may appear like reversing the maxims of the world, to look to the profession of arms for the peaceful pursuits and triumphs of the mind. But such maxims are of modern growth, and, fundamentally, they are devoid of truth. Under the despotic governments of Europe, soldiers have been too fully employed to engage in any other avocation but that which fitted them to view with composure the scenes of carnage. And in the dark ages, the profession was degraded to the mere art of elaborating brute force. But in ancient times, every philosopher, historian, orator, or poet, was also a soldier. The civil rulers in peace were the military leaders in war. The foundation of the early—of all

empires, was due to military men. The heroes, demi-gods, the divinities even, were apotheosized for distinguished feats of arms. The birth of science, the progress of art, the elements of civilization, were originated and nurtured by the virtues which the race of military men developed and strengthened. The sublimest soul of the early historic period, perhaps of all subsequent ages, the pupil of Aristotle, was at once the universal conqueror, the unsurpassed statesman, the profound philosopher. The greatest captain of the Roman era, was likewise the rival of Cicero in eloquence, his overmatch in written controversy; and, "grounded in learning," he produced amid his campaigns a grammatical philosophy—a model of historic composition which has never yet been equalled, and he reformed the computation of the year, "declaring it to be as much glory to know the law of the heavens, as to give law to men on earth." Passing over many centuries, and coming almost to our own day, the first soldier certainly of modern times was also the most eminent statesman of his epoch; and our own Washington was "equally great in the cabinet and in the field." In fact, it is the endowment of intellect and the energetic exertion of its powers, that lead to victories, and that govern states. Their possessor is qualified equally for both spheres, and for any sphere in human affairs.

The conditions of this country, and of Europe where these derogatory maxims have prevailed, are altogether different. The position of the American officer varies

in a corresponding degree. The moral force of the laws, and the cheerful obedience of a free people to the constitutional enactments of the rulers of their choice, render the commission of an officer almost a sinecure. While our fellow citizens at large, among whom the laws abolishing all distinctions of rank, of entails and *primogeniture*, prevent the frequent accumulation of overgrown fortunes, and make it necessary for almost every individual to devote the prime of life to providing for its decline; while our professors in colleges are so burdened with duties, and so poorly compensated, as to be the mere pack-horses of knowledge; and while nearly all the men of talents and easy fortunes, rush early and continue to the last in the absorbing pursuit of politics; the officers of the army, educated at the public expense, and supported for life, with few and unimportant public duties to perform, constitute the class from which can most reasonably be expected those high mental exertions for which leisure and pecuniary independence are almost absolutely requisite.

Inquiry has already been abroad to ascertain what services were rendered by them in peace, and what benefits were derived in return for their costly maintenance. In response, members from the two Bureaus of Engineers were detailed on civil duties. But for the Line, there was no satisfactory reply. The army grew unpopular, it was denounced in the Federal Legislature, its officers were stigmatized with offensive epithets, the refusal was emphatic to increase their numbers or their

pay. The Mexican war, occurring at this juncture, was a fortunate intervention. The brilliant achievements of the "kid glove" gentry, their endurance, their daring, their skill and unvaried success, effaced the recollection of former charges of inefficiency, and invested the army with the pride and the affection of the entire country, while expressions of admiration were extorted from the reluctant foreigner. Yet, hostilities having ended, the inquiry will be revived. There is no prospect of another war to quiet it. The allegations, that the army is the seminary of military science and art, that it forms a nucleus for concentration of large forces in case of difficulties, the few services rendered by the staff corps alluded to, even its importance to guard the extended frontiers, and to meet the Indian menaces,—may not content our thrifty and calculating people. And were they to do so, demagogues are ready to pervert their strong common sense, and ride into political power by indurating their nobler feelings. The same jealousies will again arise, the same denunciations be repeated. A decided action towards a reduction, or at all events the denial of a necessary increase, will inevitably follow. It becomes the army to endeavor to avert this fate, if it can be averted. They, perhaps, have it in their power, by such a devotion of their time and abilities as will discover, point out, and improve, the natural resources of the country, and will elevate its intellectual reputation among other nations. A few officers and graduates have already contributed their share to the promotion of these

objects. Several have made highly valuable scientific explorations of portions of our territory, not military exclusively, but also agricultural and geological; others have translated works and adapted them to the use of this Institution and of the army, and have written original ones that have been generally adopted in our academies and colleges; one has published an interesting compend of the science and art of war; another has issued two works on civil engineering and field fortification, which are universally appreciated. There have emanated from them, books on courts martial and ordnance, compilations of the military laws, sketches and histories of the recent struggle with Mexico, and valuable reports on the subject of national defence; while numbers, no longer connected with the service, have distinguished themselves in various useful pursuits, by their solid attainments and their trained intellects. And nearly all who have reaped the benefits of this academy, as the recent war illustrated, are prepared, in token of their gratitude, to yield their services and their lives to the disposal of their Country. All these, however, whatever pride they may inspire us with, may be deemed but individuals in an inert mass. The vast remainder must therefore follow the bright examples before them, and vindicate their class from the serious imputations of dereliction of important duties, of idle waste of the leisure and the faculties conferred for high purposes, but now desecrated to the meaner pursuits of indolence and sensuality.

In strenuously labouring to accomplish the ends adverted to, the first object of an officer, wherever he may be stationed, after a faithful performance of his military duties, should be to take an accurate view of the moral and natural circumstances by which he is surrounded. Whatever the bent of his genius, the first few years of his career should be devoted to a thorough review and study of history. Such knowledge is absolutely essential as the basis of every pursuit. Laboring in the wide field of the whole world, he must first learn what others have done, in order to make a beginning for himself. Besides, how enlarging to the mind, in every sense, to look around the earth and penetrate the veil of ages; to compare the condition of men of all climes and eras; to trace the origin and progress of all the arts; to follow the ebbs and flows of the civilizing processes, and mark their controlling influences, external and moral! To a soldier, how peculiarly interesting and instructive to examine the period of heroes, and those whose superior heroism elevated them to the rank of Gods; to analyze the great battles of other times; to extract the principles which governed in military operations, and compare them with the present conceptions of the art; to study the character and genius of the eminent captains who led mankind to victory and glory; and, finally, to imbibe lessons, of which antiquity especially is prolific, of honor, courage, fortitude and disinterestedness! On this immortal plain, the Grecian phalanx bore all before it. On that, the Roman legion

swept through the foe, resistless as an avalanche. Here, the French impetuosity subdued all odds of opposition. There, the British tenacity defied the world in arms. At one time, the fate of the civilized world hangs on the genius of Miltiades. At another, Alexander makes all mankind his subjects. At one moment Frederick wages triumphant war against the three empires of Europe. At another, Napoleon dazzles the world with his energetic genius, and treads, with iron heel, upon the despots of the continent.

How fascinating to the military student to pore over such records as these; and how profitable the fund of knowledge afforded, to aid the original and earnest mind in erecting and illustrating new theories and combinations of war, or in substantially improving the old! From those whose taste or genius is adapted to such studies,—since all who belong to the profession are by no means genuinely military men,—these results may be anticipated. The mere elaboration of principles, however, is, like the bloom of the tree, confined to the individual and the spectator,—but their application to systems and their promulgation, are like the winged seeds, which may be scattered far and wide for the benefit of all mankind. The military art like all others, is progressive. It is far from being perfect,—indeed, nothing that is human ever approximates perfection. It is not my design to trace the history of its renovation, and the advance it has made in the last three hundred

years. Close investigation will not only disclose these, but it will suggest numerous other points, susceptible of improvement, upon which the thoughts may dwell to advantage.

The prominent principles of Strategy have been known from an early period, and have been practiced by all the great commanders of the world; those of more recent origin, and the minor ones, may still be profitably discussed. Tactics have undergone numberless changes, and yet there may be many others required to simplify and improve them. The difference of effectiveness in fire arms, increasing by more perfect inventions, and consequent difference of organization of armies, may render another revolution of the system indispensably necessary. The subject of Logistics in its broadest meaning, affords an ample field for useful scrutiny. Perhaps it is the least complete of any branch of the art. There is certainly more complaint in our day, with regard to it, than there was under the Roman supremacy. Permanent Fortification appears to be established on quite stable bases; yet in its details, there is no question that genius, intently applied, will detect flaws, and provide the suitable remedies. But field fortification, if Napoleon be correct in the remark, that it has made no progress since the days of the ancients, must be still in its infancy; and should there be an invasion of this country—a not improbable event—having no interior fortresses, this department would assume the highest

importance, and it merits profound study. Other branches of the science of war demand, likewise, the assiduous attention and the laborious thought of the officer. His first meditation, as it is his first duty, should be to acquire through proficiency in his profession, and, with all his energies and faculties, to extend its limits, by discoveries, inventions, or improvements.

If our increasing greatness should, at a future time, give us pre-eminence among the nations of the earth ; if the antagonism of our political principles to the despotic rule of other continents, continues to strengthen with our strength ; if the influence of our example, aided by the spirit of propagandism, indissolubly allied with power, and expanded by the increasing facilities of navigation and the spread of intelligence, should inspire the down-trodden masses abroad with frenzied rage at their condition, and induce an augmentation of armies for their subjection and to support thrones and dynasties ; and if these causes united should counsel an un-Holy Alliance, as suggested by a Federal Senator, of Despotism against Freedom,—the Science of war would assert its proper position among the grades of knowledge. It would enlist the universal attention ; and the officers of the army are those to whom the nation's eye would turn, for all those principles and appliances required for the purposes of resistance and of conquest. Improbable as such events may appear to many, yet we know not what may be concealed in the womb of the

future. Human passions are the same at all eras. The world is obviously in a state of transition. Extraordinary changes may be confidently anticipated. Revolutions rarely occur, and are more rarely effectual, without conflict and bloodshed. And human forecast cannot penetrate the extremity to which these may determine.

At all events, the American officer should devote his intellectual energies to the various studies which his elevating and ennobling profession comprehends; and, whatever the emergency, enjoy the proud consciousness of individual preparation, while the fruits of his labors would serve to guide and instruct his fellow countrymen.

For him whose desires would dictate other pursuits, there are various departments of learning, many of which his career at this Institution will already have fitted him to prosecute. There is philosophy, in all its branches, natural, moral and metaphysical. He may explore the depths of mathematics; investigate the wonderful discoveries, and enlarge the boundaries, of chemistry; devoutly examine the theories of the globe, in the developements of geology; or hold nightly converse with the stars, reading in their pages, like the ancient Chaldee, the "fate of men and empires." Stationed on the coast, he may study the phenomena of air and ocean; or, if his genius inspire, "catch the living manners as they rise," and depict them, in that kind of writing which Cooper and Simms have made it equally

dangerous and glorious to attempt. In the interior, he may follow the pleasing and useful pursuits of mineralogy, botany, and ornithology ; or search the antiquities of America, and meditate how to solve the yet unpenetrated mystery of the origin of the Indian race.

To whatsoever course of intellectual labor his particular capacity or taste may conduct the officer, his utmost exertions should be employed to arrive at excellence. His highest ambition should be to weave a chaplet for his brow, of blended renown for himself and practical usefulness for his kind. The heroism of war may be more dazzling to the imagination, as exemplifying that sublime of courage which all men applaud, and a patriotic abnegation of self, the more admirable because the opposite tendency is the universal infirmity of man ; but the clang of clashing arms is not forever in the ear ; and the heroism displayed in peaceful occupations, if anything subordinate, is yet of a noble stamp, because uninspired by stern excitement—is more generally contagious, and more surely and more speedily conducive to the mental and moral progress of the species. Its merited rewards may not be reaped immediately. The sweetener of patient toil he may not find ; the motive to enduring effort may not ostentatiously arise before his sight ; the wreath accorded for triumphant achievement, may never adorn his living temples ;—but merit and patience win their reward at last, and virtuous resolution sustains through a long and high

career; while the cenotaph or future historian will vindicate for all time, the claim to immortality of him who has shown himself, in whatever field, the benefactor of his race.





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